Immigration to British Columbia:

Facts and Figures

May, 1991

Prepared by
Immigration Policy Branch
Ministry of Provincial Secretary and
Ministry Responsible for
Multiculturalism and Immigration

Province of British Columbia

IMMIGRATION TO BRITISH COLUMBIA: FACTS AND FIGURES

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A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

This is an exciting time we live in -- a time of rapid change in the global economy, in the exchange of ideas and in the international movement of people.

In the area of immigration, British Columbia has always played a major role as a host to immigrants from all over the world. British Columbia receives thousands of newcomers each year, and in the current decade these numbers will increase.

According to estimates based on the federal immigration plan for 1991-1995, British Columbia will receive between 30,000 and 40,000 immigrants in each of the next five years -- annual levels which have only been seen on three occasions since World War I. In addition, most of these newcomers will be from Asia, which has been the source of most immigrants to our Province in the past two decades.

These immigrants will contribute to British Columbia by bringing new and diverse skills, investing in and developing businesses, creating jobs and strengthening beneficial business ties in the Pacific Rim and elsewhere. For its part, the Province will face challenges in successfully integrating newcomers into British Columbia society. The learning of English-as-a-second language, adaptation to the local labour market and harmonious race relations are all issues to be successfully managed now and in the future. Indeed, immigration brings responsibilities as well as rewards to the host community.

Immigration to British Columbia: Facts and Figures was prepared to give up-to-date information on immigration trends, characteristics and settlement patterns in the Province. This information will contribute to an informed discussion on the role of immigration and its contribution to the social and economic development of our Province.

Elwood N. Veitch
Provincial Secretary and
Minister Responsible for
Multiculturalism and Immigration

INTRODUCTION

Immigration to British Columbia: Facts and Figures was prepared in response to the large volume of enquiries the Government of British Columbia receives about the levels and nature of immigration to this Province.

Specifically, the report identifies five important aspects of immigration:

1. the number of immigrants coming to British Columbia;
2. the source countries of these immigrants;
3. the characteristics of immigrants, including the classes under which they arrive, their familiarity with English, and their education levels;
4. the nature of immigrants' participation in the economy; and finally,
5. the geographic settlement patterns of recent immigrants.

This report is intended to provide an overview of the most significant immigration data for British Columbia. Other excellent sources for statistical data are the Planning and Statistics Division of the British Columbia Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, Statistics Canada, and Employment and Immigration Canada.

On many issues associated with immigration in this Province and in other jurisdictions, detailed information is lacking.

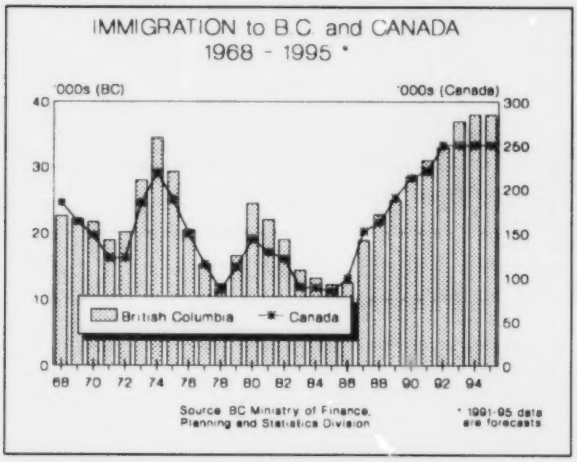
What are the factors which enable immigrants to succeed in a new country? Are recent immigrants finding it more difficult to integrate into British Columbia society than immigrants in the past? What services are most effective in assisting with the settlement and integration process? These are all important questions-questions that can only be addressed through further research and inquiry.

Immigration to British Columbia: Facts and Figures was produced by the Immigration Policy Branch of the Ministry of Provincial Secretary with the assistance of Mr. David Fenn, consultant. The Branch would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the assistance of the Planning and Statistics Division at the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations in providing both the statistical information used in this report and a critical review of the draft document. The assistance of the late Mr. Max de Boer is also gratefully acknowledged.

The most current data available were used throughout this analysis. These include 1986 census data for education, unemployment, occupation and income figures, and 1990 preliminary data from Employment and Immigration Canada for immigration levels, as well as levels estimates from the Planning and Statistics Division for 1991 and beyond.

1. Numbers

Immigration is on the upswing.



In 1990, approximately 28,000 immigrants arrived in British Columbia. This represents a significant increase in immigration levels over the preceding years. In 1985, only 12,000 immigrants arrived in British Columbia. In 1986, this figure increased to 13,000, followed by 19,000 (1987), 23,000 (1988) and 25,000 (1989).

The arrival of 28,000 immigrants to the Province means that a population equivalent to the number of people in the city of Penticton seeks, each year, to settle and establish itself in British Columbia. This represents a significant integration challenge for immigrants themselves, and for the larger British Columbia society.

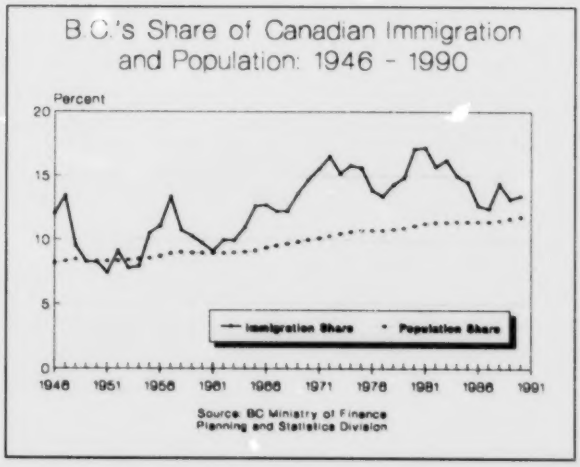
The numbers of immigrants coming to British Columbia in the future are planned to increase significantly. The 1991-1995 immigration planning levels, determined by the federal government, indicate that Canada as a whole will receive 220,000 immigrants in 1991, and 250,000 in each of the years between 1992 and 1995. These levels suggest British Columbia will receive 31,000 immigrants in 1991, and between 35,000 and 40,000 immigrants in each of the years between 1992 and 1995. This means that British Columbia's population (3.1 million in 1990) will grow by more than one per cent annually due to these immigration flows alone.

These levels of immigration in British Columbia and Canada have not been seen for some time. Since the end of the "open period" in Canadian immigration in 1913 (when 400,000 immigrants came to the country), British Columbia has received upwards of 35,000 immigrants on only three occasions. In both 1967 and 1974, about 35,000 of the 220,000 immigrants to Canada arrived in British Columbia, while in 1957, some 37,000 of the 280,000 immigrants to Canada arrived in this Province.

British Columbia is a favoured destination for immigrants to Canada.

British Columbia has historically received a large percentage of the new immigrants to Canada. British Columbia's share of the Canadian population today stands at 11.6 per cent; however its share of new immigrants to the country stands at 13.4 per cent- nearly two percentage points greater than its population share. In fact, since the early 1950s, British Columbia has always received a greater percentage of immigrants than its population share.

Another way of assessing the immigration challenge facing British Columbia is to



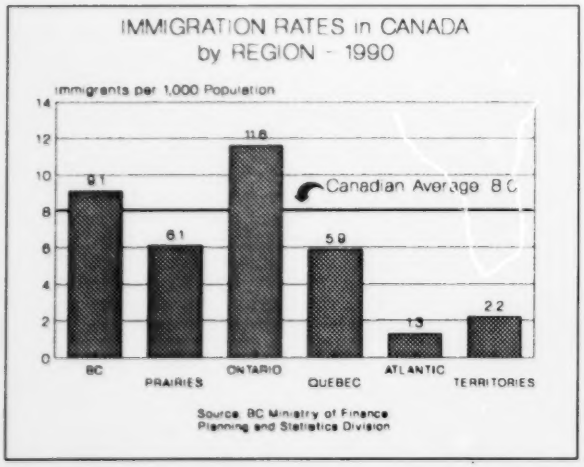
consider the rate of new immigrants coming into the province. In 1990, approximately nine immigrants arrived in this province for every 1000 inhabitants. This rate of immigration is second only to the experience in Ontario. Indeed, Ontario and British Columbia have historically had the highest rates of immigration in the country, and in the past 20 years British Columbia has had the highest rate on seven occasions.

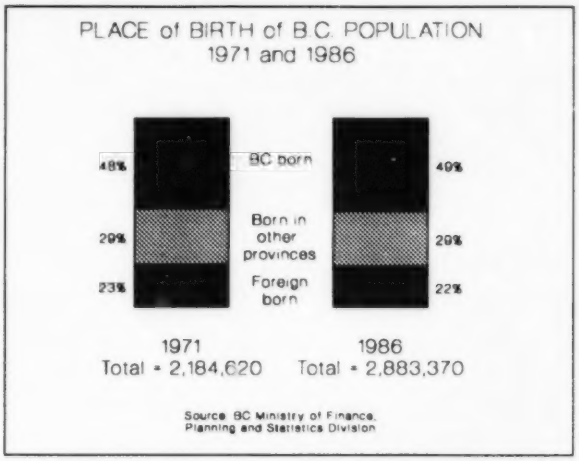
Foreign-born individuals represent one-fifth of the British Columbia population.

Foreign-born individuals in the population refer to the total number of people born outside of Canada. According to the 1986 census, 22 per cent of British Columbians were born in another country. This percentage is the highest among all provinces except Ontario.

Between 1971 and 1986, little change occurred in the percentage of foreign-born individuals in the British Columbia population. During this period, the Province's population grew by 700,000, and inter-provincial migration and the natural growth rate contributed as much to provincial population growth as international migration.

Over the next 20 years, it is expected that a different picture will emerge. Natural





increase, due to the country's low birth rate, will contribute less to provincial population growth, while immigration from other countries will contribute more, both proportionately and in absolute terms.

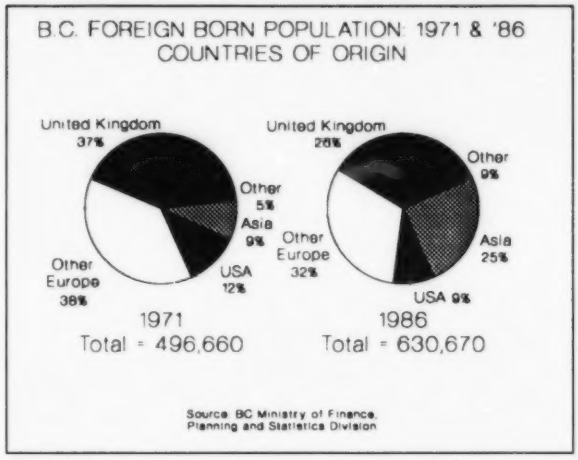
2. Sources

The sources of immigrants have been changing.

The origin of the total foreign-born population in British Columbia has changed considerably in the past two decades, primarily from British and other European countries to Asian countries such as Hong Kong and India.

According to the 1971 census, approximately 37 per cent of all foreign-born individuals living in British Columbia were from the United Kingdom, while natives of other European countries accounted for 38 per cent. The United States and Asia were the birthplace of 12 and nine per cent, respectively, of the foreign-born population.

By 1986, the United Kingdom's share of British Columbia's foreign-born population declined by 11 points to 26 per cent, while other European countries declined to 32 per cent. American-born individuals declined slightly to nine per cent. In contrast to these declines, the percentage of individuals born in Asia increased to form



25 per cent of the Province's foreign-born population- almost a threefold increase in population share from 1971.

The analysis above relates to all foreign-born individuals who have arrived in British Columbia over time. The composition of current inflows of immigrants to British Columbia also indicate that individuals from Asia will come to represent a larger share of the foreign-born population in the future.

In the single year 1990, nearly 70 per cent of the approximately 28,000 individuals who came to British Columbia were from Asia. Indeed, in each year since 1979, Asia has accounted for the majority of new immigrants to the Province.

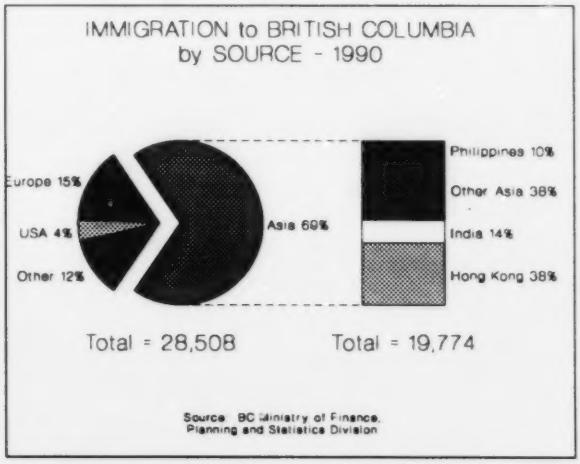
In 1990, seven of the top ten source countries of immigrants to the province were in the Asian region. These top ten countries were as follows:

1. Hong Kong
2. India
3. Philippines
4. Taiwan
5. China Mainland
6. United Kingdom
7. U.S.A.
8. Vietnam
9. Fiji
10. Poland

"Push" and "Pull" factors influence immigration.

The increase in Asian immigration over the past two decades can be attributed to what can be termed "push" and "pull" factors. A considerable number of Hong Kong immigrants, for example, have been "pushed" to leave their country, because of their concerns relating to the Chinese takeover in 1997. The large number of Vietnamese refugees who came to British Columbia in the early 1980s were also "pushed" to leave their war-torn country. Similarly, many of the 37,000 immigrants who came to the province in 1957 were Hungarian refugees who fled their country following the uprising of 1956.

In addition to these "push" factors, however, British Columbia is also attractive to many immigrants of the Pacific Rim, and thus has a considerable "pulling" influence in international movements of people. British Columbia's expanding economic role in the Pacific region, its political and social stability, and its long-established Asian communities, make the Province a very desirable destination for the Asian immigrant.



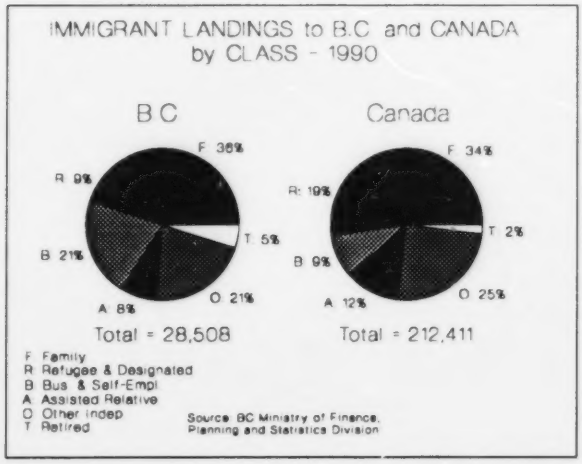
3. Characteristics

More immigrants arrive through the Family Class than any other single category.

Immigrants to Canada currently arrive through one of nine classes: Family Class, Convention Refugee, Designated Class, Assisted Relative, Entrepreneur, Self-employed, Investor, Other Independent, and Retired. The first three of these classes (Family, Refugee and Designated) are not subject to the federal points system, while the remaining six classes are subject to this system.

Briefly, the points system assesses a potential immigrant's ability to become successfully established in Canada. The criteria used include education level, vocational preparation, occupational status, arranged employment, knowledge of an official language, age and other factors.

In 1990, approximately 36 per cent (10,379 people) of immigrants to British Columbia came under the Family Class, which includes parents, spouses, fiances, and unmarried children of current residents in the country, and their dependents. Family Class represents the largest single category of immigrants to Canada, and currently receives the highest priority in federal processing, along with refugees. These facts reflect the federal government's ongoing commitment to the objective of family reunification in the immigration area.



Refugee and Designated Classes are the two other categories not assessed against the points system. Refugees to the country must meet the definition set out under the United Nations Refugee Convention, while a designated class includes persons displaced by refugee-like emergency situations or persecution, and persons to whom the federal government has given humanitarian consideration. Together these two classes represented nine per cent (2,579 people) of immigrants to British Columbia in 1990. Refugees may also make a spontaneous claim by applying at the border or from within Canada. The number of individuals utilizing this opportunity has increased dramatically in recent years. Approximately 21,000 people applied for refugee status from within Canada or at the border in 1989, while some 36,000 applied in 1990.

Other Independents comprised 21 per cent (6,092 people) of the immigrant population to British Columbia in 1990. This class represents those people who are applying for landed immigrant status based solely on their ability to settle and work in Canada. In 1990, it is estimated that nine per cent of British Columbia's immigrants were selected primarily on the basis of their labour market skills (i.e. principal applicants in the Other Independent category).

Investors, Entrepreneurs and Self-employed, along with their dependents, comprised 21 per cent (5,892 people) of immigrants to British Columbia in 1990.

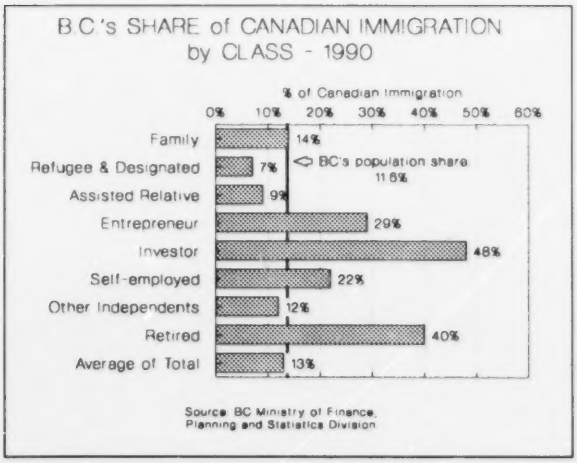
Investors under the new business immigration rules are required to have operated a financially successful business, to have an accumulated net worth of $500,000, and to make at least a $350,000 investment in an approved business activity in the Province. In 1989, the latest year for which final data are available, a total of 253

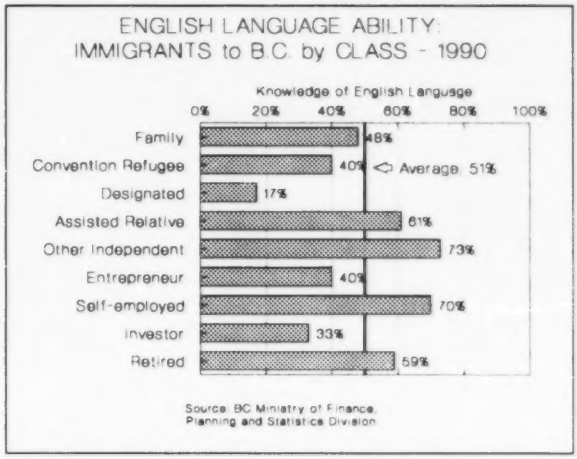
investors (principal applicants) with total assets of $534 million arrived in this Province.

Entrepreneurs are required to establish or purchase a substantial interest in a business in Canada, to have day-to-day management of the business, and to create or maintain employment for at least one Canadian citizen, other than the principal applicant or dependents. In 1989, some 758 entrepreneurs (principal applicants) came to British Columbia with an average net worth of $1.8 million, and proposals to create a total of 3,400 new jobs.

Self-employed is a relatively small class. It includes those who intend to establish a business in Canada that will employ himself or herself, and will make a significant contribution to the economy. Examples of individuals in this class are professional athletes and artists.

British Columbia has been very successful in attracting business immigrants (investors and entrepreneurs). In 1990 for example, 48 per cent of all investor immigrants to Canada settled in British Columbia. However, approximately 75 per cent of those investors who settled in British Columbia in 1990 made their initial business investment in another province. As well, 29 per cent of all entrepreneurs identified British Columbia as their initial destination. However, this figure significantly underestimates the actual entrepeneurial settlement in British Columbia due to in-migration from other parts of Canada.

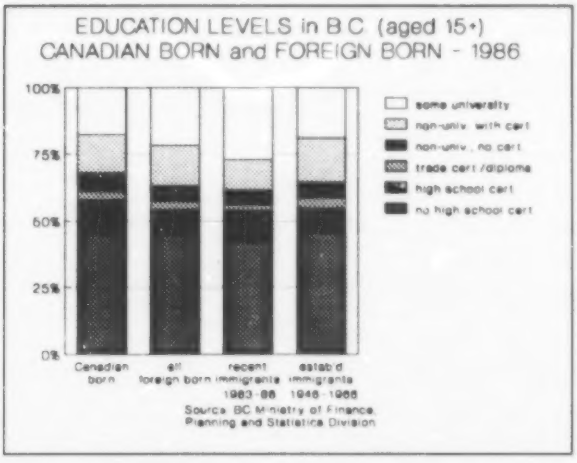




Assisted Relatives are another type of independent immigrant, as they are assessed against economic selection critieria. This class, however, receives "bonus points" because family members in Canada are willing to help them become established. In 1990, 2,176 immigrants arrived through this category, representing eight per cent of all the immigrants to British Columbia in that year.

The final class is the Retired category. These are unsponsored independent immigrants, 55 years or older, who have sufficient funds to maintain an adequate lifestyle without government aid while in Canada. Although only five per cent of immigrants to British Columbia in 1990 were from the retired class, this is a large share compared to the rest of Canada. In fact, British Columbia attracted 40 per cent of all retired immigrants who arrived in Canada in 1990. The federal government recently announced the elimination of the retired class, which will come into effect June 30, 1991.

Half of the immigrants to British Columbia have English language ability.



Although there are no written tests or formal assessments, federal immigration officers are required to record the general English language ability of prospective immigrants. The most recent data indicate that approximately one half of the recent immigrants arriving in the Province have some English language ability. This corresponds to the 1989 data, and represents a decline from 1988, when 60 per cent of immigrants had some English language ability.

These data also indicate that English language ability varies considerably between immigration classes. Generally speaking, convention refugees and members of designated classes (this includes spouses and dependents) are the immigrants least likely to have any knowledge of English. Immigrants arriving under the independent classes (i.e. all classes except the family class, convention refugees, and designated classes) are more likely on average to have some knowledge of English. The entrepreneur and investor classes have less English language ability than the family class on average but numbers in the former are also considerably smaller.

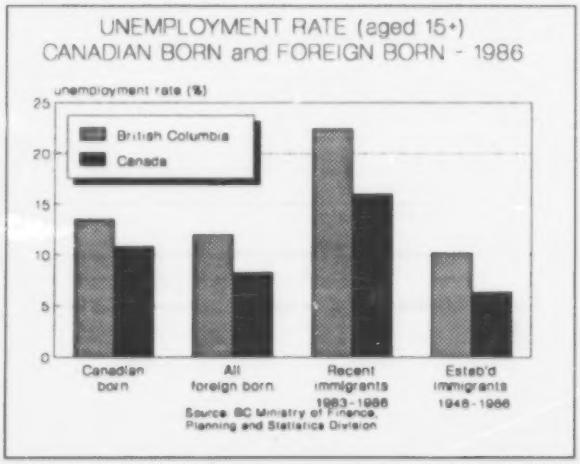
Education.

In terms of education levels, a larger percentage of recent immigrants to British Columbia have a university education than either the Canadian-born population or immigrants who arrived previously. At the other end of the education spectrum, the Canadian and foreign-born populations (including recent immigrants) have comparable proportions of people who have not graduated from high school. An important issue related to the education levels of immigrants is the equivalency of education between jurisdictions. A lack of recognition of foreign training and credentials is often cited as a major barrier to immigrants in obtaining appropriate employment in Canada.

4. Economic Participation

Employment.

In the 1986 census, foreign-born individuals as a group had a lower unemployment rate than the Canadian-born population. This was the case in both Canada and British Columbia. Within the foreign-born group, "established" immigrants (those who arrived between 1946 and 1966) have shown to have an unemployment rate considerably less than that of "recent" immigrants. It is noteworthy that the unemployment rates shown in the chart on this page are from 1986, and that unemployment rates in the province are lower today. In December,



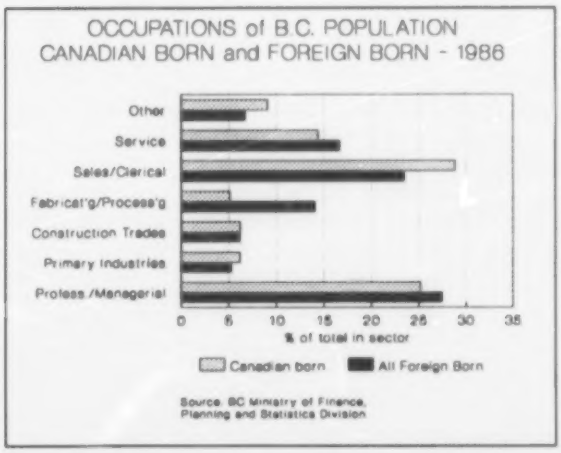
1990 the seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate for the general population in British Columbia was 9.2 per cent, compared with 13.1 per cent in 1986.

Occupation.

In terms of occupational comparisons between the Canadian and foreign-born populations, the latter is slightly more concentrated in service, processing, professional, and managerial occupations. Correspondingly, the Canadian-born population is more concentrated in primary, sales, and clerical occupations.

Differences in occupations within the foreign-born population are quite large. Recent immigrants are much more likely to be found in service occupations than are established immigrants. The same situation exists in occupations in the primary industries, but recent immigrants are less likely to be found in managerial and professional occupations, or in the construction trades.

Differences between the occupational characteristics of recent immigrants and those of established immigrants can be attributed in part to differences in the occupational structure of the British Columbia economy at the time of each wave of immigration, as well as the changing occupational and educational characteristics of immigrants themselves.



Immigrants have historically played a significant role in filling shortages in the labour market, as well as expanding the demand for and supply of domestic goods and services generally. At the same time, recent research has indicated that certain immigrant groups are over-represented in what may be termed "declining industries" or contracting sectors of the economy. These immigrants may face particular labour adjustment problems in the future, and will likely place greater demands on labour adjustment programs.

Income.

There are differences between the median* incomes of the foreign-born and Canadian-born groups as measured in the 1986 census.

In Canada, foreign-born individuals earned more than the Canadian-born, but in British Columbia the reverse was true.

Within the foreign-born population, there is considerable variation in incomes. Recent immigrants to both British Columbia and Canada have incomes which are half those of established immigrants. This variation can be explained in part by the age differences between recent and established immigrants, and the time that most immigrants require to adjust to a new country. The data may also suggest, however, that recent immigrants to the country are facing additional labour force difficulties. Recent research indicates that many immigrants today do not possess the necessary English language ability and skills to be as successful in the labour market as past immigrants have been.

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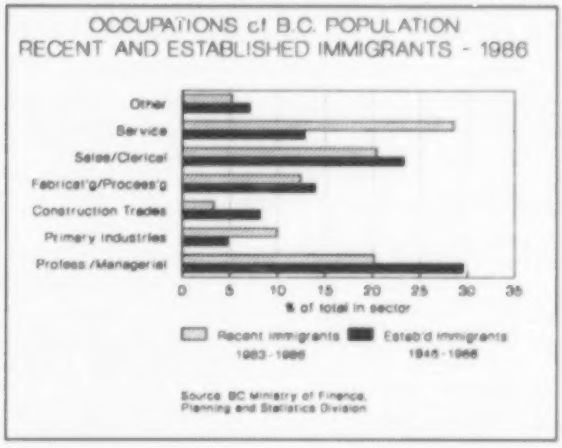
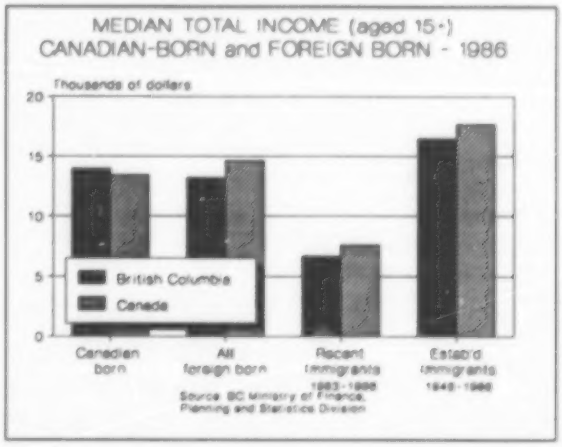
* The median income is the middle in the range of incomes of census respondents. Unlike the average income (the mean income), the median income is not affected as severely by the presence of a few extremely large incomes in the group.





5. Geographic Settlement Patterns

Immigration to British Columbia is focused on the Lower Mainland.

Immigration to Canada and British Columbia is largely urban focused. Sixty per cent of immigrants to Canada today settle in the three major centres of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

In 1990, over 23,000 immigrants were destined for the Vancouver area, representing over 80 per cent of new immigrants to the Province. This share of immigrants to Vancouver represents a large increase from two decades ago, when only 60 per cent of immigrants were destined to this city. The recent concentrations of immigrants in Vancouver have put significant pressures on settlement services such as ESL (English-as-a-Second Language).

It should be noted that urbanization is not principally an immigration phenomenon; some 50 per cent of the British Columbia population lives in the Vancouver area. Recent studies have shown that it is this larger population, and particular age cohorts within it, that is creating the large demand for housing and many other services in the Lower Mainland today.

Many more immigrants today are also choosing to settle in areas nearby the City of Vancouver, such as Burnaby, Richmond, Surrey and West Vancouver. The reasons for this outward movement match those of other Canadians- the search for reduced population pressures and lower housing prices and, of course, the establishment of better transportation links with the urban core. With this outward movement of immigrants it is expected that the demand for immigrant support services, such as English language training, will increase in these neighboring communities.

Other communities in British Columbia also face integration challenges.

While Vancouver attracts by far the largest share of immigrants to the province, other communities also face integration challenges. Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Kamloops, Quesnel, Prince George and others all receive significant numbers of immigrants relative to their population sizes. The smaller population bases in outlying communities mean that these areas may have fewer settlement services for newcomers.

6. Further Research

The Ministry of Provincial Secretary, in cooperation with other provincial ministries, is undertaking a variety of research projects to improve our understanding of immigration and its impacts on British Columbia society. This information on the social and economic

issues associated with immigration will assist the Ministry in the development of appropriate public policies to strengthen the contribution of immigration to the Province.

If you have comments on this report, or would like copies of other Ministry publications on immigration, please contact:

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